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ABSTRACT

The Surplus Schools Project was designed to stimulate and encourage the adaptive use and preservation of vacant school buildings in New York State. Through a statewide competition, the Preservation League selected four surplus schools that were located in four distinctly different communities and presented a broad range of problems and opportunities. With the cooperation of a local sponsor, the Preservation League provided each community with the professional services of an architect who formulated schematic adaptive use plans and feasibility studies for the school. The results of these studies were highlighted in this technical leaflet and in a traveling exhibit. The studies indicate that two schools could be transformed to community service centers, one could function as senior citizen housing, and another could be converted to a sculpture studio and school. (Author/MLF)

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# Preservation League of New York State

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Technical Series/No. 6

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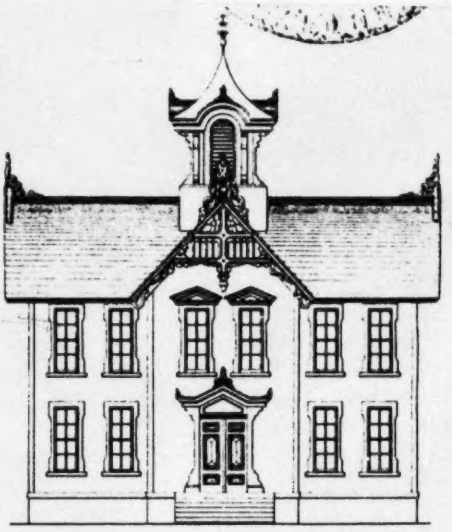
## Solutions for Surplus Schools



During the past four years over 330 public elementary and secondary schools have been declared surplus by school districts in New York State. Declining enrollments, open school plan requirements, limited state aid to rehabilitate older facilities, and consolidation of facilities have all contributed to what has become an acute state, as well as national, problem. Many communities across the country have responded to the challenge that these abandoned resources represent by developing innovative adaptive use solutions which involve a range of activities, from social services to private enterprise.

New York State has many commendable examples of converted school buildings. In Albany, Public School 25, built in 1878, was turned into the Albany Area Environmental Center by a coalition of environmental and other public service groups. The conversion was financed through a low-interest bank loan and aided by manpower provided by the city of Albany. The former DeWitt High School, built in downtown Ithaca in 1915, was converted to a shopping, office, and residential complex. A private architect/developer accomplished the conversion using conventional funding. In Long Island City, Queens, Public School 1, built in 1893 and abandoned in 1963, was recently adapted, with the aid of bank loans and public and private foundation funding, as Project Studios I, which provides low-rent studios for 35 artists. In the village of Hobart, the former school building now houses the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development and a number of community-service offices. A local foundation aided the adaptive use.

However, many school buildings, especially those in densely-populated, older urban areas, remain vacant and subject to vandalism. Once highly visible social and economic anchors and often important architectural landmarks in the residential neighborhoods they served, these buildings, when abandoned, can quickly become sources and centers of neighborhood blight. In addition, annual costs to maintain a vacant school building can range from $20,000 to nearly $85,000 in New York City. Communities are no longer able to bear these staggering financial and social costs.

In response to this situation, the Preservation League of New York State conducted a special technical assistance program in 1977-78. Known as the Surplus Schools Project, the program was designed to stimulate and encourage the adaptive use and preservation of vacant school buildings in New York State. Through a statewide competition, the Preservation League selected four surplus schools which were located in four distinctly different communities and which presented a broad range of problems and opportunities. With the cooperation of a local sponsor, the Preservation League provided each community with the professional services of an architect who formulated schematic adaptive use plans and feasibility studies for the school. The results of these studies are highlighted in this leaflet and in a traveling exhibit available from the Preservation League (see page 6).

The studies indicate that two schools could be transformed to community service centers, one could function as senior citizen housing, and another could be converted to a sculpture studio and school. The variety of these uses demonstrates the potential of surplus school buildings in New York State. It is hoped that in addition to satisfying the needs of their immediate community, these studies can serve as models for the re-use of other surplus schools in other communities.

This project was made possible in part with public funds provided by the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## Drum Hill High School

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| **Location:** | Ringgold Road<br>Peekskill, New York |
| **Date built:** | 1910 |
| **Owner:** | City School District of Peekskill |
| **Proposed use:** | Sculpture studio and school |
| **Project architect:** | J. Raymond Matz, A.I.A. |
| **Community coordinator:** | William Wasserstrom, Director<br>City of Peekskill Department of Planning and Development |
| **Estimated costs:** | $2,457,750 ($34/sq. ft.) |

Drum Hill High School was completed in 1910 to the designs of architect E. E. Joralemon. Since 1972 the building has been vacant. Because it is unheated and subject to continual vandalism, many Peekskill residents and community leaders have predicted an end to its useful life. Repeated attempts by Peekskill city officials to interest developers in adaptive uses for the school were unsuccessful until the Preservation League and J. Raymond Matz, A.I.A., began investigation of the building's potential.

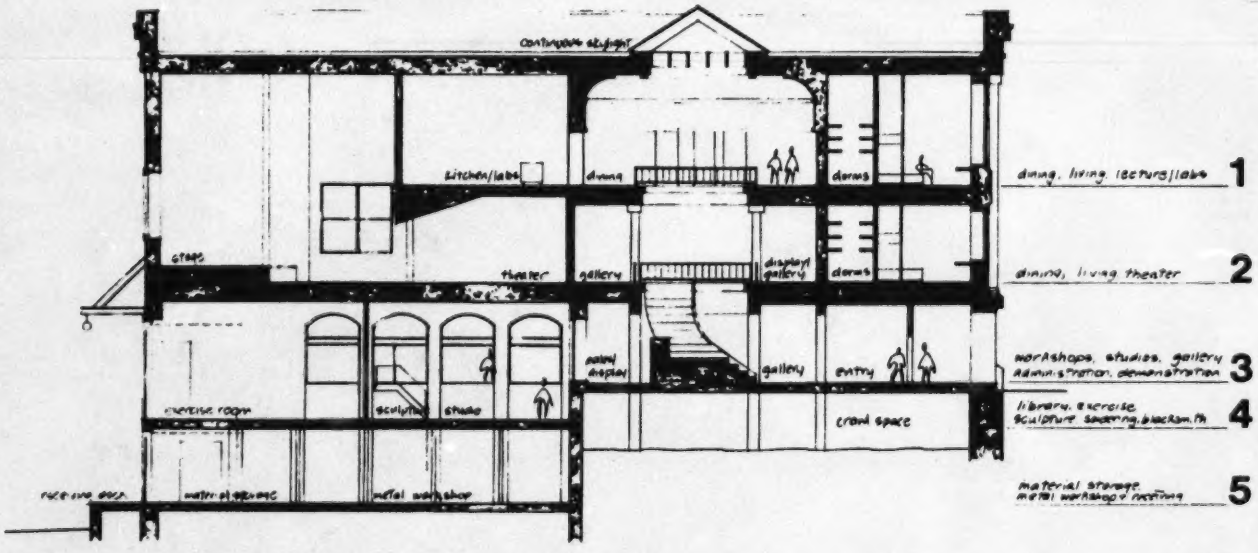
Perhaps the structure's greatest architectural asset is its huge three-story enclosed atrium, which floods the interior of the building with light. Replete with classical details and castings from ancient sculpture, the atrium contains a dramatic double curving staircase and is roofed with stained glass. However, in nearly any commercial adaptive use of the building, this beautiful space would be considered useless and unproductive.

Therefore, Matz sought an institutional use which would preserve this unique feature of the building. Matz located Tallix, Inc., a local art casting firm, which had been interested in starting a school to train craftsmen. Together they have developed a proposal to develop Drum Hill High School as a nonprofit applied arts school. By training craftsmen and sculptors in the technology of metal sculpture casting, the school would provide a service available at only one other location in the Northeast. It is envisioned that a school housed in the building could accommodate seventy-five students and a resident faculty of at least eight. In addition, the facility would provide craft and art programs for city and county residents, as well as weekend seminars.

The four floors of the building could comfortably adapt to the requirements of the school. The two upper floors would provide living and eating space for students and faculty. The first floor would provide space for display, studios, and administrative offices. The lowest floor would function as the receiving area for the whole building and also contain the foundry and storage. The atrium would remain unchanged and continue to function as the building's main circulatory space.

Vandalism has left the building's mechanicals systems useless. Replacement would cost an estimated $965,750. Other estimated construction costs to adapt the building to a sculpture studio and school amount to $1,492,000 for a total of $2,457,750 or $34/sq. ft., not including acquisition costs. Costs to construct an entirely new facility with the same program requirements would reach $60/sq. ft., for a total of $4,410,000.

*The huge Drum Hill High School is dramatically situated o a bluff overlooking Peekskill. The Neo Classical Revival style building commands spectacular views of the Hudson Highlands.*




*Section of the building showing proposed uses on each level.*

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## Harry N. Hoffman School

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| **Location:** | Church and Hoffman Streets<br>Elmira, New York |
| **Date built:** | 1897; significant additions in 1926 and 1954 |
| **Owner:** | City School District of the City of Elmira |
| **Proposed use:** | Community service center |
| **Project architects:** | Peter W. Parsons, A.I.A., and Stephen R. Griffing |
| **Community coordinator:** | Thaddeus G. Klub, City School District of the City of Elmira |
| **Estimated costs:** | $950,000 ($22/sq. ft.) |

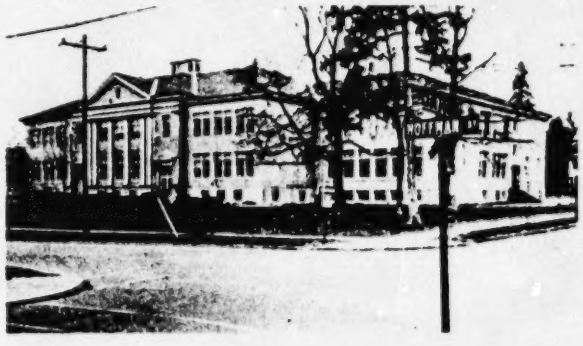
The Harry N. Hoffman School was built as an elementary school in 1897. In 1926 eight classrooms were added to serve an expanding neighborhood, and again in 1954 the school received the addition of an auditorium/gymnasium. In 1976 the school was declared surplus, and soon afterwards a number of community groups approached the City School District of the City of Elmira desiring to make use of the vacant space. The school district has allowed some community programs to function in the facility for the past year. The school district, however, was anxious to explore a range of re-use schemes for the building.

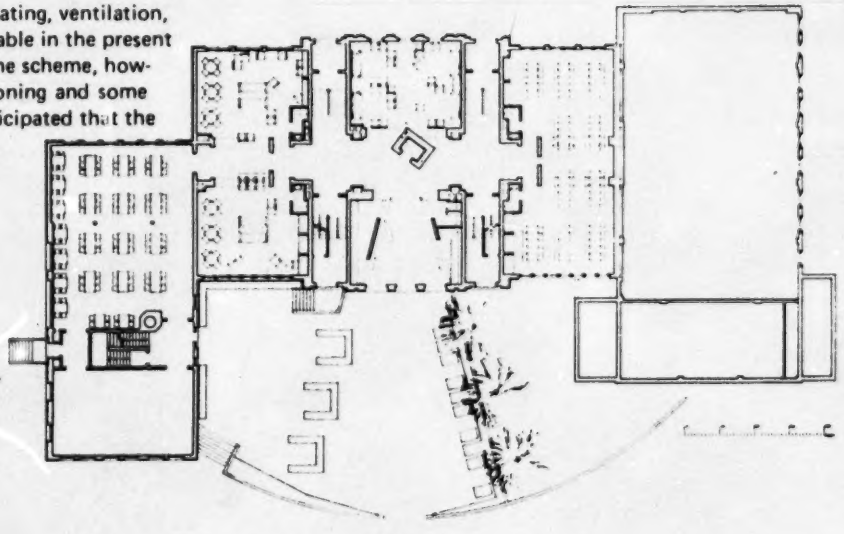
Peter W. Parsons, A.I.A., and Stephen Griffing, working under the auspices of the Preservation League and in close cooperation with the school district and a number of civic groups, initiated a process to stimulate interest in restoring the building to its central role in the life of the neighborhood, one of Elmira's oldest. Adaptation of the building to commercial uses, while economically attractive, was rejected on the basis of its incompatability with the residential neighborhood. Housing, less economically feasible, was considered by neighborhood residents as foreign to the institutional character of the building and its setting. In more qualitative terms it was enthusiastically agreed that the best use would be as a community center serving primarily senior citizens, but also including children's daycare and spaces for neighborhood events.

The re-use plan proposed by the architects transforms only those aspects of the building which are necessary to accommodate new activities within it. The building would be made accessible to the elderly through design of a terrace raised to the level of the school's main floor and approached by ramps. An elevator would be added at the building's center. The main floor could comfortably accommodate senior citizens' social activities by removing classroom/corridor walls. The adjacent north wing would be transformed into a dining space. The upper floor would accommodate senior citizen social service and program offices. The lower floor would be converted to children's daycare with outdoor space adjacent to the raised terrace but separated by being at a lower level. The auditorium/gymnasium would remain unchanged and available for shared use by senior citizens, children's daycare, and neighborhood groups.

Having been rehabilitated recently, the heating, ventilation, electrical, and plumbing systems are re-usable in the present scheme with only minor modification. The scheme, however, calls for the addition of air-conditioning and some additional life safety equipment. It is anticipated that the project will be phased subject to further classification by the client group. The estimated construction costs of $950,000 do not include acquisition costs of the building. The project is expected to be implemented by the United Community Services as agents for the building. Present programs in the building are receiving funds from the Community Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

*Harry N. Hoffman School*



***First floor plan as transformed into senior citizen service center. The raised terrace at the rear of the building would provide on-grade access to this floor. The lower level of the terrace would be an outdoor play area for children.***

The Oswego Middle School was built in 1923. Located on a busy street adjacent to Oswego's central business district, the design and siting of the school are typical of many urban school buildings dating from the first half of the 20th century. However, by Spring, 1979, the building will have served its useful educational life. The City School District of Oswego, eager to avoid the conflicts and confusion that often arise when a school building is declared surplus, have already begun planning for the ultimate disposition of the large four-story brick structure.

Working with school district officials, the Preservation League and the Oswego Office of Community Development, William Scarbrough, A.I.A. designed an adaptive use plan for converting the school building to senior citizen housing. The plan creates 31 apartments -- 29 one bedroom units and six two-bedroom units. In addition, the facility would provide space to centralize senior citizen activities now scattered around Oswego. The plan proposes that the senior citizen center be located on the ground floor and the housing units on the first through third floors. Location of the center on the ground floor would allow barrier-free, grade-level access to a proposed re-designed parking lot on the west side of the building. An elevator serving all floors is provided in place of an existing staircase.

In the plan the existing main entrance to the building remains and leads to an upper mezzanine in the proposed lobby. This space would be created from the present library and would function as a lounge. Adjacent to the lobby would be an outdoor area on top of the mechanicals equipment room and an indoor garden on the second and third floors of the building.

The remaining space on the first through third floors consists of apartment units. By utilizing existing classrooms as the basic apartment unit, the plan requires no significant structural changes to the building, with the exception of the entrance lobby. It is anticipated that the building's existing heating system would remain with only slight alterations; a new elevator, new plumbing and electricity would be the only major mechanical costs.

It is recommended, although not essential to the re-use plan, that the existing aluminum sash be replaced with single-hung, four-over-four wood windows. This would restore the facade of the structure to the original design and contribute to the thermal efficiency of the building.

## Oswego Middle School

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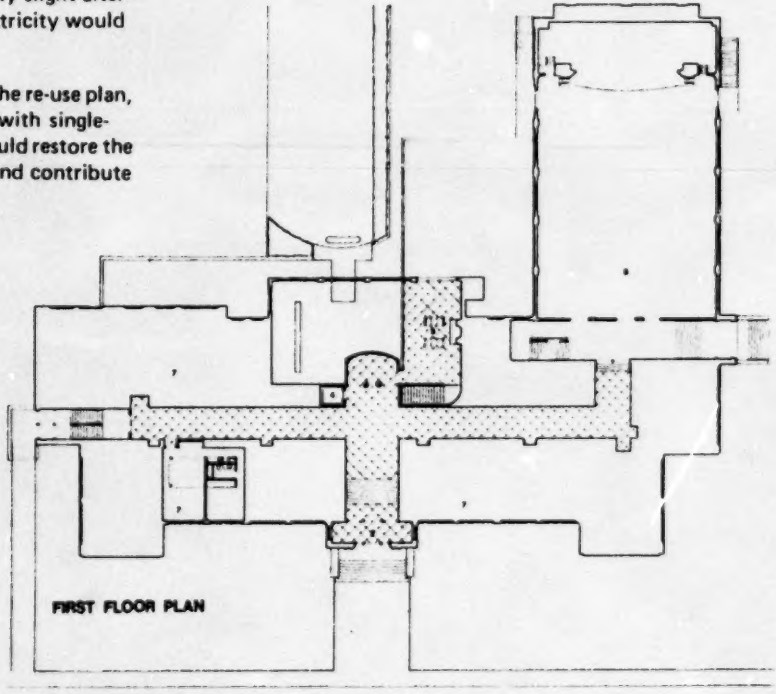
|---|---|
| **Location:** | 270 West First Street<br>Oswego, New York |
| **Date built:** | 1923 |
| **Owner:** | City School District of Oswego |
| **Proposed use:** | Senior citizen housing |
| **Project architect:** | William Scarbrough, A.I.A. |
| **Community coordinator:** | Dr. Lawrence A. Kiley, Director of Instruction, City School District of Oswego |
| **Estimated costs:** | $479,000 ($16/sq. ft.) |

Total cost of the project is estimated at $479,000. This figure does not include acquisition costs, which have not been established. The cost is roughly $16,000 per apartment, a figure which compares very favorably with current estimates for similar new construction of $25,000 per apartment.

*Oswego middle School*




***Proposed floor plan showing installation of a typical apartment unit in an existing classroom.***

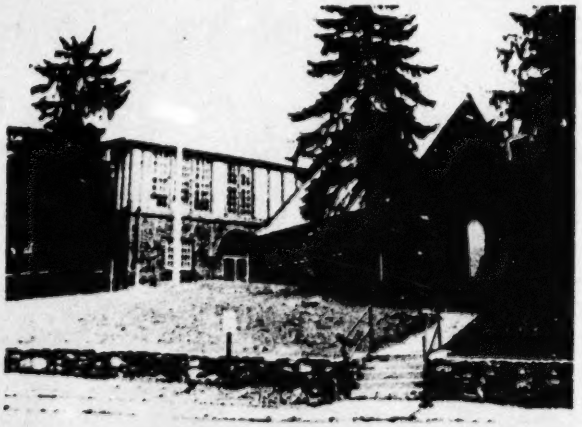
Washington Avenue School was built in 1919 and for the next 57 years functioned as a typical small-scale elementary school occupying a central social role in a constantly evolving neighborhood. Although built for children of families elite who had fled New York City, by the time it was closed in 1975, the school was serving one of the most economically, racially, and socially diverse populations in Westchester County. Plant obsolescence forced the school to close, but for the next two years it housed the town of Greenburgh's recreation office and some related programs.

The Task Force to Save Washington Avenue School, a group of community leaders, was formed in 1977 to help determine the future of the school building. After canvassing neighborhood residents, speaking with town officials, and holding open forums, the Task Force formulated a plan to use the building as a community center for young adults and senior citizens. With the aid of a grant from the Preservation League, the concepts of the Task Force were translated by James R. Doman, A.I.A. into a proposed adaptive use plan for the building. Supplemental construction costs for the plan were provided by Herman Flowers of Urbanex Construction Corporation, a local rehabilitation and renovation firm.

Not surprisingly, the two-story, double-winged structure adapted easily to the Task Force's program. Initial investigations bore out subsequent design studies demonstrating that major physical and structural changes to the building were unnecessary. Minor modifications, such as removal of some non-bearing walls, will allow existing classrooms to function as multi-purpose meeting spaces. Many spaces, such as kitchens and rest rooms, will retain their present functions. Renovation of existing mechanical systems, replacement of the roof, and a number of cosmetic changes on the interior will be all that is necessary to transform the school into a community service center.

Located only one block from one of Westchester's major bus routes and commercial streets, the Washington Avenue School is in an ideal location in terms of use by children, teenagers, and senior citizens who are without access to an automobile. The school is also on the route of a federally-financed mini-bus system which provides free local transportation to Greenburgh residents.

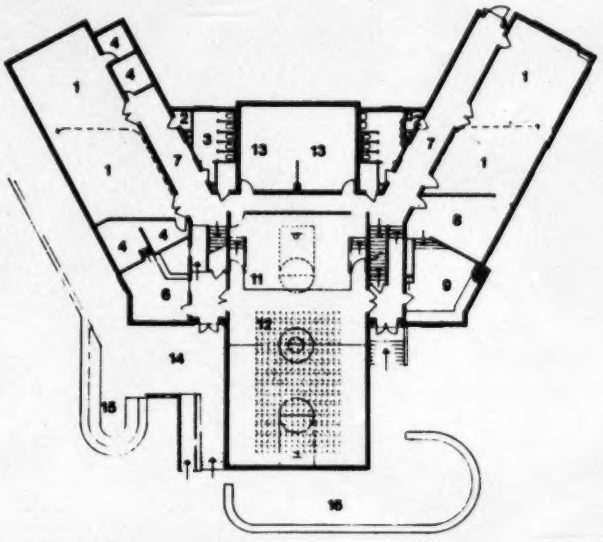
*Washington Avenue School*



## Washington Avenue School

| | |
|---|---|
| **Location:** | 55 West Hartsdale Avenue<br>Hartsdale, New York |
| **Date built:** | 1919; addition 1930; remodeling 1954 |
| **Owner:** | Greenburgh Central School District No. 7, Hartsdale, New York |
| **Proposed use:** | Center for young adults and senior citizens |
| **Project architect:** | James R. Doman, A.I.A. |
| **Community coordinator:** | Joel Bender, Task Force to Save Washington Avenue School |
| **Estimated costs:** | $244,360 ($21/sq. ft.) |

Total cost of the project is estimated at $244,360. This figure does not include acquisition costs, if any. The Task Force is presently investigating funding sources for the project.




*Proposed Plan*

1 *meeting area*
2 *janitors' closet*
3 *toilet*
4 *office*
5 *storage*
6 *reception*
7 *corridor*
8 *dining*
9 *kitchen*
10 *multi-purpose space*
11 *movable stage*
12 *movable seating*
13 *backstage/rehearsal*
14 *entrance plaza*
15 *outdoor seating*
16 *outdoor seating*

## Traveling Exhibit

Together with the publication of this technical leaflet, an outcome of the Preservation League's Surplus Schools Project is a traveling exhibit. Called *Solutions for Surplus Schools,* the exhibit highlights the feasibility studies produced during the project. The exhibit consists of five plexiglass-covered panels which contain text, black and white photographs, and architectural drawings. The panels, which measure 30" x 40", are fitted for hanging on walls or display on easels. The entire exhibit is transported in a custom-made wooden shipping box.

This traveling exhibit is available on loan for a nominal fee to school boards, school districts, public agencies, preservation organizations, historical societies, and other interested organizations in New York State. For more information contact the Preservation League of New York State, 13 Northern Boulevard, Albany, New York 12210, 518-462-5658.

## Suggested Reading


Abramson, Paul; Sargent, Cyril G.; Ringers, Joseph; and Moses, Vicki. *Surplus School Space: Options and Opportunities.* New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories, 1976. 72 pp. This report is directed toward community decision makers. It outlines procedures which school districts can follow to deal in a reasonable way with declining enrollment as well as options districts might choose as alternatives to mothballing or abandoning surplus schools. Available for $4.00, postpaid, from EFL, 850 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Bunnell, Gene. *Built to Last: A Handbook on Recycling Old Buildings.* Washington: The Preservation Press, 1977. 126 pp. These specific examples of recent adaptive use projects in Massachusetts include school buildings. Photographs and drawings are included along with construction data, project history, and financial information. Available for $6.95, postpaid, from Preservation Bookshop, 740 Jackson Pl., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

Keller, William. *Enrollment Trends, Programs for the Future.* Albany: State Education Department, 1976. 84 pp. A planning guide for school district officials on how to cope with decline. The report discusses sale, leasing, and alternate use. Included is a very useful checklist to follow when mothballing closed school buildings. Limited copies available from Office of Research, Planning and Evaluation, State Education Department, Albany, N.Y. 12234.

New York Department of City Planning. *Surplus School Space: Some Facts About Re-use.* New York: Department of City Planning, 1977. 44 pp. Describes special conditions in New York City in the adaptive use of vacant school buildings. Limited copies available from City Planning Commission, 2 Lafayette St., New York, N.Y. 10007.

Oliva, Patricia L. *The Empty Classroom, What's Next?* White Plains: Westchester County Department of Planning, 1977. 60 pp. A report on declining enrollment in Westchester County with suggestions for re-use of surplus facilities. Limited copies available from Department of Planning, 432 County Office Building, 148 Maritime Ave., White Plains, N.Y. 10601.

Sargent, Cyril G., and Handy, Judith. *Fewer Pupils/Surplus Space.* New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories, 1974. 55 pp. This report is primarily for school boards, administrators, and education professionals. It focuses on demographic trends and the process of arriving at whether or not to close a school. Available for $4.00, postpaid, from EFL, 850 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Sargent, Cyril G., and Moses, Vicki. *The Secondary School: Reduction, Renewal, and Real Estate.* New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories, 1976. This report concerns the future of high schools. Its focus is not re-use but expansion of services to the community. Available for $4.00, postpaid, from EFL, 850 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022.


## Film

*Back to School to Live* (1976). 16 mm., color, sound film. The dramatic story of the conversion in 1975 of a late 19th century school building in Gloucester, Mass., into 80 apartments for the elderly. Includes interviews with the architect, developers, and present tenants. Purchase or rental from Albert Viator, 3 Calder St., Gloucester, Mass. 01930. Rental only in New York State from the Preservation League, 13 Northern Blvd., Albany, N.Y. 12210.

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This leaflet was compiled by Frederick D. Cawley, Assistant Director of the Preservation League, who administered the Surplus Schools Project. The following people generously offered advice during the project: Jeffrey Bowen, Thomas Canaday, Robert T. Coles, Paul Malo, John I Mesick, William C. Shopsin, and Kenneth R. Toole.

Photo credits. Page 1, plate 36 from *Bicknell's Village Builder* (New York: Architectural Book Publishers, 1872); p. 2, City of Peekskill Department of Planning and Development and J. Raymond Matz; p. 3, City School District of the City of Elmira and Peter W. Parsons; p. 4, City School District of Oswego and William Scarbrough; p. 5, James R. Doman.

The Preservation League of New York State is a private, nonprofit organization whose primary purpose is to stimulate and encourage public participation in historic preservation throughout the state. This publication is made possible with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Ellis L. Phillips Foundation.

Additional copies of this Leaflet are available for $1.00, postpaid, from the Preservation League of New York State, 13 Northern Boulevard, Albany, New York 12210. Special rates are available for large quantity orders.

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